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ABSTRACT

The paper describes a methodology to aid educators as they evaluate educational programs aimed at changing students' attitudes, values, and/or behavior. The major objective of the evaluation method is to analyze the content and/or process that underlies behavior in a given situation. In addition, the paper relates how this method was used to evaluate a program for preparing elementary school students for the mainstreaming of handicapped students into their schools. Basic questions addressed by the evaluation focus on whether the program succeeds in changing student attitudes, values, and/or behavior toward people perceived as different (for example, handicapped students) and on how specific aspects of the curriculum contribute toward achievement of stated objectives (for example, acceptance of handicapped students). Measurement techniques included questionnaires designed around teachers' experiences with the program and student attitudes toward handicapped persons before and after participation in the program, observation of changes in patterns of social interaction among students as a result of program participation, and observation of changes in the way in which students' observable behavior indicated a change in self-concept as a result of program participation. (DB)

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The Use of Anthropological Theory in an Educational Program Evaluation

a paper presented at the 78th annual meetings
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When people complain about the quality of schooling in America, they are almost always referring to the failure of the schools to get the students to learn enough, or to learn fast enough, or to learn the right things. Educational programs of the type that most frequently call for the skills of an evaluator are created to correct for these failures. They tend to be of at least three types. These include those that promise to increase knowledge of traditional subject areas in better ways so the students will learn the material better and faster; those that introduce new subject matter or subject matter that has not traditionally been taught in the schools; and those that focus on non-cognitive goals, promising changes in the "affect" of the students. In this paper, I will be describing a methodology used to evaluate an educational program of the latter type--a type of program I consider to be uniquely amenable to traditional anthropological research. I feel this way for the following reasons.

When educators speak of affective goals such as changes in values/attitudes, they are seeing those changes as motivators of behavioral change. No-one can <u>see</u> values or attitudes, they can only see what they interpret to be their manifestations in behavior. So, educational programs that seek to change students' attitudes or values are ultimately concerned with changing their behavior. The job of the evaluator of such a program is, thus, to abstract motivational features from manifested behavior--to somehow connect how the individuals think and feel with how they act. This sort of abstraction is done by educators, parents, and everyone else on a daily basis-- we simply know such things. That's because we commonly attribute behavior to affective motivation. "Johnny's been smiling at Susie alot lately (behavior), he must like her (affect)." We do this all the time and we're frequently right in

our assessments-- that's what communication is all about.

Those who employ evaluators, however, are looking for more "scientific" proof that these programs are achieving their goals. Non- anthropological evaluations of such programs typically employ such instruments as pre and post attitudinal tests which are compared for changes. Even when these actually measure attitudes or values--which we can never know for sure-- they fail to address the real concerns of these programs-- whether they have effected the desired behavioral changes. Traditional anthropological research, on the other hand, has been concerned with this very subject for years. What is ethnography, after all, if not a process whereby we determine how motivational features are translated into behavior. We can argue as to what those features are, where they come from and so on, as we do; but the only useful theory is that which enables us to look at behavior and see the content and/or processes that lie behind it.

Throughout this year, I have been evaluating an educational program called the Community Awareness for Deinstitutionalization Project. The Community Awareness Project, which was created by the Ohio Association for Retarded Citizens, is designed to prepare pre-college level students for the mainstreaming of handicapped students in their schools. It attempts to achieve this goal by changing the students' negative attitudes and values with respect to the handicapped--attitudes that are conceived as being born of ignorance and by the processes of labeling and judging negatively, anyone perceived as different.

The Community Awareness project's program is administered by regular classroom teachers to their students. They do this with the aid of a curriculum

which is programmed for each grade level from pre-school through high school. The program takes two school weeks to administer. During the first week, the teacher presents verbal, audio-visual, and written materials to her/his students. These materials are provided by the Ohio Association for Retarded Citizens. During the second week, the students are visited by a variety of guest speakers which include parents of handicapped children, handicapped adults, agency representatives and others who work with the handicapped. The program is culminated by a field trip to visit handicapped people, either in schools, workshops or institutions. The speakers and field trips are also arranged for by the project's central office.

The Community Awareness project was first administered in early 1977. Since that time it has been piloted in 58 schools by some 150 teachers in 12 counties in Ohio. Up to this point in time, news of the project has been transmitted primarily by word of mouth. This is because it is not connected in any official way to the educational system. Attaining some sort of connection is a primary goal of the project's staff. In particular they want to present the project to the State's Board of Regents in hopes of having it made a requirement for all students in pre-service education college programs throughout Ohio. My evaluation of the project, among other things, is supposed to provide them with ammunition to convince the Board of Regents that the project is effective in creating positive attitudes and values relating to the handicapped.

My evaluation of the Community Awareness project was designed to address two basic questions: Do the curricula succeed in changing students' attitudes/values/behavior towards those perceived as different in general and handicapped

persons in particular? and, What aspects of the curricula contribute more or less towards the achievement of that goal?

I used both survey and ethnographic techniques to generate that information. I sent out two sets of questionnaires: one to all the teachers who had administered the project during the two years of its existence, and another to individuals who had been cited by the project staff as being responsible for introducing the project to their communities and schools. I referred to these individuals as contact persons. The questionnaires, which were made up primarily of open-ended questions, were designed to essentially have the participants "walk through" their and the students experience of the project.

The ethnographic studies, which are the primary concern of this paper, were conducted in two elementary school classes where the teachers were administering the Community Awareness curriculum in the Spring of 1979 for the first time. The classes, which were located in different schools and in different counties, were composed of third and fifth graders, respectively. I chose those grades because the curricula for the 1st-3rd grade level and the 4th-6th grade level differed considerably in expectation of the analytical expectations of the students. In the first instance, the curriculum is designed to have the students simply identify their own similarities with those of handicapped individuals. In the second, it is designed to have the students understand the processes whereby people label and judge perceived individual differences.

Those <u>particular</u> two classes were chosen for more pragmatic reasons. In each case the teacher was scheduled to administer the Community Awareness program somewhere in the middle of the three months I had to work with. In a

very general sense, the research was modeled after a typical experimental evaluation design. The first month was used as a sort of "pre-test" period during which I became acquainted with the students and the ways they organized themselves socially. The period following the administration of the curriculum was my "post test" period, during which I looked for changes in the social organization of the students. During the two weeks of the project's administration, I focused primarily on their written and verbal activities vis a vis the handicapped and their experience of the project.

Mainstreaming of handicapped students had not taken place in either of these schools (although there were some special education classes in both) so I was not going to have the opportunity to observe the student's interactions with individuals with handicaps per se (except on the field trip which was part of the curriculum). Instead I focused on their interactions among themselves and, in particular, those of the so-called "socially handicapped" within the group. My justification for doing this comes from the curriculum guide itself. In the 1st-3rd grade curriculum, the students begin the program with an excercise in which they are asked to compare themselves with their peers for similarities and differences. This is done because it is assumed thatacceptance of differences in individuals who are real and close in the students' lives will be a first step in their learning to accept people who are more distant and more obviously different. The 4th-6th grade curriculum, in addition to the above, have a section in which the students are expected to generalize (by understanding the processes of labeling, etc., as mentioned above) to <u>any</u> population or individual perceived as different. For example, it includes a story in which a white woman stereotypes a black child and his family.

Within any social group, as we all know, there are always individuals who are more and less valued by their peers. And, it usually takes a very short time to find out who's who in the so-called social hierarchy of a given group. As I mentioned in the beginning of this paper, that kind of discrimination almost falls under the rubric of "common sense". And this was clearly the case in my experience with both of these classes. I knew where each child "fit" within a couple of days. The question remained however, if this is to be a reasonably scientific study, how did I know? What behaviors or behavior patterns signaled the mutual evaluation of these students? To answer this question it is necessary to look at the theoretical bases for the particular research design I chose to use.

The underlying theory stems from the ideas behind what are loosely called "interactional approaches." According to McDermott and Roth, interactional approaches are ones that:

> call for a description of the ways people organize concerted activities in each others presence and adopt methods which assume that a persons behavior is best described in terms of the behavior of those whom the person is doing interactional work in the construction of recognizable social scenes or events.

The focus, then, is on observable behavior--behavior that we can see and describe as two or more individuals engage in interaction. The theory, furthermore, defines those interactions as being internally structured by the actions of the participants. The actions are described as "concerted". I interpret this loosely to avoid the idea that all interaction involves conscious design. But it is clear that this approach conceives that the internal structuring that goes on in interactions is imbued with meaning. The structuring itself comprises the content of the communication.

In addition, and of great importance to this research, is that the content is conceived as an activity or action rather than an object. So, when we talk about contents such as values or attitudes, using this approach, we turn them from nouns into verbs. Instead of trying to find out what a person's "values" are, we look at how he or she evaluates. Once the content becomes a process or action, it becomes observable. Having established this, at least on a theoretical level, I had only to figure out how the particular valuation process I was interested in--how individuals define themselves and others in relation to one another--manifested in the behavior of the students. This differed in the two classes, but turned out to be a relatively simple task--I believe--because the theory I was using provided a view that helped me to clear away alot of noise and focus on observable behavior.

In conclusion, I have found that educational programs that focus on non-cognitive goals, such as the one described above, are particularly amenable to research guided by interactional theory. This is so because the interactional approach enables the researcher to focus on observable behavior and provides the a coherent way of connecting thought and feeling with that observable behavior. Among contractors where the traditional concern is for numbers and other "concrete" abstractions, the ability of the researcher to provide a simple and elegant explanation for her/his conclusions is of great importance to the success of the evaluation enterprise.